

1 _____ BILL NO. _____

2 INTRODUCED BY _____
3 (Primary Sponsor)

4 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT AUTHORIZING SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO OFFER AN ELECTIVE
5 COURSE IN BIBLE STUDY; PROVIDING A PURPOSE FOR AN ELECTIVE BIBLE STUDY COURSE;
6 PROVIDING INSTRUCTIONAL ELEMENTS THAT MAY BE INCLUDED IN AN ELECTIVE BIBLE STUDY
7 COURSE; REQUIRING A TEACHER TO DEMONSTRATE BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE TO
8 BE ELIGIBLE TO TEACH THE ELECTIVE BIBLE STUDY COURSE; REQUIRING A SCHOOL DISTRICT TO
9 NOTIFY LOCAL MINISTRIES AND ASK FOR SUPPORT IN IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUALS QUALIFIED TO
10 TEACH AN ELECTIVE BIBLE STUDY COURSE; AMENDING SECTION 20-7-112, MCA; AND PROVIDING
11 AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

12
13 WHEREAS, as stated by Justice William O. Douglas in *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952), "We
14 are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.... When the state encourages religious
15 instruction or cooperates with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian
16 needs, it follows the best of our traditions. For it then respects the religious nature of our people and
17 accommodates the public service to their spiritual needs"; and

18 WHEREAS, all the miseries and evils from which humanity suffers -- vice, crime, ambition, injustice,
19 oppression, slavery, and war -- proceed from a despise or neglect of the precepts contain in the Bible; and

20 WHEREAS, today's youth need to have God's Word integrated into their lives if they have any hope of
21 surviving and flourishing in today's postmodern, anti-Christian culture; and

22 WHEREAS, an elective course offering the study of the Bible would provide students with the
23 marvelous opportunity to study God's Word and have it change their lives for eternity; and

24 WHEREAS, religion is essential in promoting the well-being and strengthening of the morality of our
25 culture and our nation; and

26 WHEREAS, the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and Article II, section 5, of the
27 Montana Constitution guarantee the freedom of religion as a fundamental right that has been protected
28 throughout American history; and

WHEREAS, an elective Bible study course would provide an opportunity to teach students important values and help the students improve their relationships with their family, friends, and communities.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

NEW SECTION. Section 1. Bible study offered as elective. (1) The trustees of a school district may offer a Bible study course as an elective course. The purpose of a Bible study elective course is to:

- (a) teach students knowledge of biblical content;
- (b) provide a foundation in biblical morals and ethics;
- (c) help students develop a strong sense of self-esteem and self-worth;
- (d) teach students values such as honesty, integrity, manners, and respect for one's self and others;
- (e) improve the self-confidence of students and decrease risk-taking behaviors; and
- (f) teach positive coping skills to give students a greater understanding of their value and their potential for the future, lowering the risk of suicidal or violent behaviors.

(2) The contents of the elective course may include:

- (a) instruction in the content of the Bible, along with contextual information about the historical, cultural, and geographic settings of the books or passages studied;
- (b) memorization of scripture;
- (c) illustrations and examples for students to apply the word of God to their own lives;
- (d) handouts for each lesson to enhance students' comprehension of the material; and
- (e) time to pray for students and to build community.

(3) An elective Bible study course may address core Christian principles but may not include instruction in denominationally specific materials.

(4) The elective course must be taught by an individual who has demonstrated biblical knowledge to support the content instruction and curriculum through the accurate use of scriptures. The school district shall notify local ministries of the elective course and ask for the participation of local pastors from different denominations to identify individuals with the appropriate biblical knowledge and background to teach the

elective course. The individual who agrees to teach the elective course may serve as a volunteer in the position.

Section 2. Section 20-7-112, MCA, is amended to read:

"20-7-112. ~~Sectarian publications prohibited and prayer~~ Prayer permitted. A publication of a sectarian or denominational character may not be distributed in any school. Instruction may not be given advocating sectarian or denominational doctrines. However, any A teacher, principal, or superintendent may open the school day with a prayer. ~~This section does not prohibit a~~ A school library ~~from including~~ may include the Bible or other religious material having cultural, historical, or educational significance in its collection."

NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Codification instruction.** [Section 1] is intended to be codified as an integral part of Title 20, chapter 7, part 1, and the provisions of Title 20, chapter 7, part 1, apply to [section 1].

NEW SECTION. **Section 4. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2023.

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